



## When and How the presence of Sankara had been felt in the ancient Tamizhagam ?

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### Introduction

The dates of Sankara vary from 6th century BCE to 9th century CE depending upon different supporting evidences. There have been some extreme datings like 32nd cent. BCE and 14th cent. CE also, which can be retracted as they are not supported by any evidences, except by mere mentioning. However, there are two groups who specifically form short-listing the available varied dates. Thus the date of Sankara has been fixed as 788-820 CE by the modern scholars based on several synchronisms, a Cambodian inscription, Dravidasisu reference etc. Other scholars have fixed the date 509-477 BCE based on the literary, contemporary, astronomical and other evidences. In fact, the Mutts claimed to have been established by Sankara follow only the date 509-477 BCE. As Sankara was born, brought up, educated in scriptures, became sanyasi at young age and most of his other activities must have taken place in the ancient Tamizhagam i.e. the present south India, his presence could not have been unfelt by the colleagues and contemporaries in his lifetime. As his work has been so predominant, it could not have been unnoticed by others. Thus the following points are considered.

1. As Sankara has taken birth in Tamizhagam and therefore, had he been so active during the periods 6th and 5th centuries BCE or 8th and 9th centuries CE, he would not have been forgotten to be mentioned by the contemporary rulers, philosophers, saints, poets and others.
2. In fact, he has been credited for the unification of Hindu religion under the banner of 'Sanmata' embracing all faiths and bring them under six major paths :-

Sl.No.	Main Deity	Faith and worship of
1.	Ganapatya	Ganapati, Vinayaka etc.
2.	Kaumaram	Kumara, Muruga etc.
3.	Vaishnavam	Visnu, Tirumal etc.
4.	Sauram	Sun, Agni etc.
5.	Saktam	Sakti, Parvati, Kotravai etc.
6.	Saivam	Shiva, Pasupati, Rudra etc.



Then, such unification should have been supported by literary and archaeological evidences of either period.

3. In that process, he had to face many sects, their leaders, and heterodox groups and they must have recorded about his encounters with them,
4. Above, all, he had been credited with or accused of driving Buddhism away from India. If this is the case, he must have been mentioned as an adversely in Buddhist literature, subsequent to the respective periods.

These points are kept in mind in analyzing the issue in the context of ancient Tamil literature, and Tamizhagam (South India).

**The mention of the word Sankara or Shankara in the Sangam Literature :** The "*Sankara*" is not found in the sangam literature, but, the wording "*Shankara*" is found in the expression *Sankarudanan* is used in Paripadal (3:81) to denote "*a person who draws / contracts / attracts everything together*" (Sankarshana = Balarama)

Interestingly the meaning of Sankara and Shankara in Sanskrit is significant in the context :

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Sankara | Conferring happiness or prosperity, auspicious, propitious  |
| Sankara | Noun of Siva<br>Noun of a celebrated teacher and author   |
| Sankari | 1. Noun of Parvati, wife of Siva<br>2. Bengal madder<br>3. The sami tree  |
| Sankara | 1. Commingling, mixture, intermixture<br>2. Blending together, union<br>3. Confusion or mixture (of castes), unlawful inter-marriages resulting in mixed castes.<br>4. Combination of two or more dependent figures of speech in one and the same passage opposite to <i>samsrusti</i> where the figures are independent.<br>5. Dust, sweepings |

Therefore, it is evident that the word and its meaning Shankara might have been known to the people of Tamizhagam or Sangam period (500 BCE to 500 CE or 300 BCE to 300 CE). Nigandus, the Tamil lexicons like Centan Divakaream (6th Cent. CE) and Pingalanthai (7th /9th cent. CE) mention



Sankaran denoting Lord Siva. They also mention Adi to denote the First or the Original. Incidentally, Sankara blended, united and combined all the sects of 'Sanatana Dharma' or Hindu religion together under the "Sanmata".

**The use of expression Adi :** The expression Adi has been used in many places denoting the following meanings;

1. The First
2. The Very First
3. The Original First

The references are discussed as follows:

1. *Adimandhi* is wife of Attan Atti mentioned in the Sangam literature (Agananuru .45, 56, 236,376, 306)
2. *Adibrahman* = the First Brahma (Pari.3:6)3.
3. *Adiandan* = The First Brahman = Brahma (Pari.11:22)
4. *Adiraibal* = auspicious day with the nakhsatra of Adirai (Pari.11:7)
5. *Adirai Mudhalvan* = Shiva (Pari.8:6)
6. *Adivaraham* = The First Boar, who rescued the submerged world / Vedas from the flood waters (2:28-35) etc. are used in Paripadal.

In Imberungappiyangal, the expression Adi is used widely as an adjective with other words to denote Jaina and Buddhas.

1. *The Adimudhalvan* (Mani.6:11, 10:61, 12:37, 121:108, 29:23),
2. *Adisan munivan* (7:19),
3. *Adijinendra* (29:47), etc. denoting Buddha, the Gautama in Manimekhalai.
4. *Adinaikan* = the First Duty to be performed to the Lord (Civaga.665),
5. *Adimudhunaikan* = the First Lord (Vivaga.1797),
6. *Adiyantamagandra* = the one without starting and ending (Civaga.3082),
7. *Adikalattu andanan magan* = the son of the first Brahman i.e. Brahma implying the Svayambu Manu (Civaga.366),
8. *Adikkalam* = at the time of creation i.e. the first time implying the first auspicious period of six chronological periods according to Jaina philosophy (2713), are used in Civagacintamani.



Tirukkural mentions Adibaghwan, which is interpreted as the names of mother and father of the poet Adi and Baghawan. The discussion of Adi Baghawan by the commentators is also informative. The word Adi denotes the First, the very first i.e. the origin and Baghawan (=bagha + wan) connotes "having possession of everything in him". Thus, it is evident that the usage of Adi in the appropriate context has been prevalent since Sangam period. Therefore, had Sankara known as Adi Sankara, definitely, he would have been mentioned in the Sangam and as well as post-Sangam literature, but, his name Sankara or the expression Adi Sankara is not at all found. Thus, the concept of linking Adi with Sankara must have been the practice of later period. Particularly, when different Sankaracharyas of different mutts started gaining prominence, to differentiate the First Sankara from his predecessors and others, he might have been denoted as Adi Sankara.

**The Presence of Concepts of Vedanta in the Sangam Literature :** The Advaita philosophy is explained simply in the following verse of Sankara :

*Brahma satyam jagan mithya jivo brahmaiva naparah*

It can be put into the following points :

1. The Brahman is the reality.
2. The phenomenal world is illusory.
3. The embodied soul is indeed the Brahman itself, and is not different from it.

These ideas have been found in the Sangam literature constituting Pattuppattu and Ettuttogal. The word Brahman though not used, the concepts of transient and momentary nature of life, cyclic nature of birth and death, that death is there for everybody who is born and none escapes from it, the relation between body and soul, transmigration of soul etc., have been abundantly found and discussed.

In Tirukkural, these concepts are expounded specifically under chapters Transient nature, True knowledge, Killing desire, Destiny and other related topics - the Praise of God, the Goodness of Rain, the Greatness of the Renounced, the Insistence of Righteousness, Impartiality /Discriminative power, Self-control, Divine grace, Penance, Truthfulness, etc. The ten verses of the chapter Transient nature are enough to prove that the concept of Vedanta has been ingrained in Tirukkural.

As such concepts have been explained in Tamil, the terminology may differ, but the ideas are same. Thus, the presence of Vedanta / Advaita found in the Sangam literature leads to the following possibilities :



1. The influence of Vedanta / Advaita is found in the Sangam literature.
2. Thus, Sankara might have preceded Sangam period.
3. As such ideas are present already in Tamil literature, Sankara might have been influenced by it.

The verification of possibilities :

1. The Vedic influence on Sangam literature has been accepted and discussed by the Tamil scholars and historians. Therefore, the presence of Vedanta / Advaita ideas in the Tamil literature is appreciable and reasonable.
2. Had it been true and historical, then the existence of Sankara before Sangam period can be considered.
3. Had Sankara lived in the post-Sangam period, it is quite possible that he might have been influenced by it. However, there is no proof that Sankara knew Tamil.
4. As he appeared to have conversed and debated in Sanskrit at different parts of Bharat, it is evident that either Sanskrit was lingua franca of Bharat at his times or he must have used local languages.
5. He became capable of interpreting the scripture at the age of twelve, and completed the writing of the bhashyas at sixteen. Therefore, the influence of other factors on him is ruled out.

**Adi Sankara making references about Nayanmars :** In the slokas attributed to Sankara, there are some references, which are taken by the scholars and interpret that Sankara has alluded them and therefore, he might precede them. In Saundarya Lahari, there is a reference of "Dravida shishu" mentioned (verse.75). Here, scholars are divided in the interpretation of the expression "Dravida shishu". One group argues that it refers to Sankara himself and another holds that it refers to Tirugnana Sambandar, a Tamil Savite Saint-poet of 7th century CE. Thus, the latter group asserts that Adi Sankara must have preceded Tirugnana Sambandar and therefore, his date could be fixed in 8th century or so.

Adi Sankara in the same work, in 63<sup>rd</sup> sloka alludes to Kannappa Nayanar as follows :

***Margavarttapaduka pasupate : Ankasya kurcayate.....***

Then, it can be argued that Kannappa Nayanar preceded Adi Sankara.

Similarly, in *Sivabhujanga Stotra*, he mentions the following personalities as follows :



*Na sankremi kanta pardhrohalesham katam piryase tvam na jane girisha |  
Tata hi prasanaarsi kanyapi kantasutadhrohino va pitrudhrohino va | |*

and their literary meaning is given against each :

1. **Kantadrohi** = enemy or adversary of wife.
2. **Sutadhrohi** = enemy or adversary of son.
3. **Pitrudhrohi** = enemy or adversary of father.

Those who are familiar with Sirutondar togal (a compilation of devotees) and *Periya puranam*, (A Big or Great Purana, which narrates the lives of Saints of Lord Siva), they can easily identify such personalities as follows:

Expression used	Equivalent Personality and his name according to Tamil Literature	Their approximate date period
Kantadrohi	Sundaramurthy Nayanar Iyarpagal Nayanar Kazharsinga Nayanar Kalikamba Nayanar Kunguliyakalaya Nayanar	7th or 9th century CE Before 12th century CE - do - - do - - do -
Sutadhrohi	Sirutonda Nayanar	8th Century CE
Pitrudrohi	Chandesha Nayanar	Before 12th century CE
	Kannappar	- do -

In sivanandalahiri, there is a mention about worship of Siva by throwing stones on Him) verse.81). Then, it might imply Sakya Nayanar and also Arjuna. Therefore Sankara has actually alluded Sakya Nayanar or Arjuna has to be decided carefully in the context, as it can be interpreted that the predecessor of Sankara was Sakya Nayanar thus placing somewhere in 6th / 7th / 8th centuries or Arjuna thus putting him during 3102-3050 BCE period

Here, it has to be noted that the dates of Nayanmars have not been fixed conclusively. It is not known as to whether all 63 Nayanmars enumerated are historical or otherwise, as the narratives contain many hagiographical incidents and miracles like apocryphal narratives of other world religions. Therefore unless the dates of Nayanmars are fixed conclusively they cannot be linked with Sankara or fix his date. Moreover, he could have used such expressions in general also. Moreover, Sanskrit scholars who have analysed the verses of these slokas have clearly shown that the said works have not been written / composed by Sankara.

**Tirugnana Sambandar and Adi Sankara :** There have been striking similarities between Adi Sankara and Tirugnana Sambandar and some of the important points are discussed as below:



1. The commentators of Sankara Vijayas record that Suresvara and Totaka, his disciples are known to refer to their Acharya as Dravida or Dravida. And hence, he might have referred to himself as Dravidashishu. In fact, the usage of such adjective or phrase had been so common in that period, as we find in the expressions like Dramidacharya, Dramidadesa sankatana (Kharavela inscription), Panca Dravida (the five Brahmin groups of South India including Orissa) etc.
2. Moreover, the incidence of Devi suckling crying baby has been there even in the case of Sankara, as in the case of Tirugnana Sambandar.
3. Therefore, linking of the date of Adi Sankara with Tirugnana Sambandar appears to be the brainchild of Tamil knowing scholars taking a prompt from the expression "Dravida shishu" as the sanskrit commentators refers it to Sankara only. But, now, it has been proved that the author of Saundarya Lahiri is not Adi Sankara.
4. The temptation of identifying Dravidashishu with Sambandar should be due to the fact that Sambandar criticized, condemned and attacked not Buddhism and Buddhists with a very strong disparaging language, but Jainism and Jains (Arugan, Arugar, etc).
5. Both debated with other opponent philosophical experts and defeated, but Sambandar in Tamil and Sankara in Sanskrit. There is no reference that Sankara ever used Tamil.
6. As one of the dates of Sankara has been 7th century also, he can be made contemporary of Sambandar, then, scholars could discover a very strong premises for driving away Buddhism out of South India and even outside of Bharat.
7. To push further, it can also be argued that both worked together in this regard to achieve their ambition, who lived 32 years and 16 years respectively.
8. But, the plan of Sankara had been entirely different, as he never had any forceful encounters with Buddhists or Jains. His attempt had been successful in unification of the splinter groups of India that could be fit into the frame work of "*Sanatana Dharma*", which is otherwise conveniently mentioned as "*Hindu Religion*".

One important internal evidence of Sambandar clearly shows that he succeeded Sankara. Sambandar in his Tevaram says, "*Lord with Crescent - you were earlier the Measurer of Six Faiths and now the blessing God of all*" (11-29-5). Sambandar, thus, specifically mentions about "six faiths" for which Shiva is the Lord. This also proves that Sambandar could not precede Sankara,



because, it is Sankara, who has been credited with the introduction of Sanmata. Therefore, taking the literary evidence of Sambandar (7th cent.CE) and archaeological evidence of Mahendra Varman I (600-630 CE), Sankara has to be placed before 6th cent. CE.

**The Dates of Sambandar :** As Sambandar's date is associated with Sankara, his date has to be fixed correctly. The dates of Tirugnana Sambandar vary from first century BCE or CE to 7th century. As he lived for just 16 years, some scholars have recently raised a doubt as to whether such a personality has ever existed at all. In any case, the different dates assigned to him by different scholars are tabulated as follows :

No.	Author & reference	Date / period	Reasoning
1.	Simon Kasi Chetty <sup>s</sup>	5th century CE	As mentioned in the Cholas "Puruva Copper Plate", Sambandar Navukkarasar and Nambiyarurar belonged to the same period.
2.	Taylor	1320 BCE	According to him, Kun Pandian reigned during 1320 BCE and therefore Sambandar belonged to the same period.
3.	C. W. Damodharam Pillai	Before 2000 years before present	As Kun Pandian existed 2000 YBP, Sambandar must have existed accordingly
4.	P. Kumaraswamy	1st century CE	As the story of dead-merchant due to poisoning is found in Silappathikaram, according to Gayabahu synchronism 113-135 CE, he must have existed some years before him.
5.	Hultszh	c. 1st Cent.CE	As most of Thevara songs were composed during the reigns of Karikalan and Koccenganan, there is no bar to fix the dates of authors of Thevaram to their period.
6.	P. Sundaram Pillai Cent. CE	Beginning of 7th Dravidasisu with	Based on the identification of Ganana Sambandar and hence he must have existed before Sankara.





7.	Doraisamy Pillai	6th cent.CE	If "Tirumetralli" temple is equated / identified with "Tirukatralli", then, he must have belonged to 550 CE, as Hultszh has fixed the date of "Tirukatralli" as 550 CE
8.	K.S. Srinivasa Pillai	Between 609 and 642 for 16 years	
9.	P. Soundara	638 - 656 CE	Contemproneity of Sirutondar, Appar etc.
10.	M. Rajamanickam	640 - 656	— do —
11.	R. Vellaivaranar	638 - 654	— do —
12.	Avvai S. Doraisamy Pillai	639 - 655	— do —

Here, it can be noted as to how dates are fixed depending upon the known dates by any scholars who attempted to do so. Fro example, P. Sundaram Pillai fixes date of Gnana Sambandar based on the identification of Dravidasisu with him and hence he must have existed before Sankara, while other scholars do other way. In fact, in his discussion, he himself clearly realizes the impossibility of Sankara recording the Nayanmars. About Dravidasisu, discussion has already been made.

#### **The "Gayabahu synchronism" and Related Datings used in the Tamil Chronology:**

The "Gayabahu synchronism" is adapted and adopted widely by the western scholars for the Tamil chronology and Tamil scholars too. But, the western scholars themselves expose the hallowness in such methodology. Heinze Bechert, in his recent research on the date of Buddha points out as to how scholars manipulate different data and information for their required purposes. He accepts following facts :

1. The interesting aspect concerns the origin of chronological information and its use by historians.
2. He points out in the volume on the date of Buddha, that the reader would meet with various examples of the fabrication of chronological constructions and synchronisms.
3. In the case of Sri Lanka, he mentions three such examples —
  - i. The synchronism of Vijaya and Nirvana of Buddha



ii. The "Gajabahu synchronism"

iii. The contemporaneity of Kalidasa and Kumaradasa

4. The early historiographers construct a synchronism between Vijaya, the mythic forefather for the claim of the Sinhalese, and the Nirvana of Buddha, in order to serve as legitimation for the claim of Sinhalese to be the Buddha's elect people (Mahavamsa 6.1-7). However, this Vijaya-Buddha synchronism is not the only construction of Sinhalese mythology, which has misled scholars into believing that it represents reliable historical information.
5. The second is the well known "Gayabahu Synchronism", which still serves the basis for early Tamil chronology. Therefore, the Tamil chronology constructed is under cloud and the Tamil scholars should take note of it.
6. As G Obeyesekere has clearly shown this synchronism is a purely mythological construction without any historical foundation.
7. Another example refers to the date of Kalidasa. The tale of contemporaneity of Kalidasa and Kumaradasa, alias Kumaradhatusena, has been considered by various earlier scholars as a confirmation of their dating Kalidasa. However, Kumaradasa, the author of Janakiharana, lived several centuries later than king Kumaradhatusena, and this tale is a rather late invention.

Therefore, if the "Gayabahu synchronism" is based on the mythology, the dates fixed on such synchronism cannot be taken as historical. As many dates have been accepted as decided ones based on this synchronism in Tamil history, they have to be revised cautiously. Thus, the date of Sambandar cannot be linked with Sankara and accordingly, the fixation of the date of Sankara in the 7th or 8th century has to be decided carefully based on other historical evidences.

The relative datings / chronology used is thus questionable. At least, there should be some independent dates based on which other dates could be cross checked, verified and fixed, but all dates could not be relative and dependent on others. When all dates fixed are provisional, such provisional dates cannot be taken as finalized dates for historical interpretation.

**Ceranadu / Keraladesa Tradition:** According to Sangam literature, Ceranadu / Keraladesa had been part of the Tamizhagam. Paditruppattu picturizes as to how the Cera kings had been following Vedic practices. However, archaeological evidences place Kerala in historical settings on later period. Sankara is not mentioned in the Keralite / Malayalam records.

The scholars point out that the earliest written document available in Malayalam goes back to 9th century only. Therefore, the silence of Malayalam literature about Sankara is obviously reasonable. In fact, even the origin of Sanskrit literature is traced back to 7th century only in Kerala. How then



Sankara could have learned Sanskrit, mastered Vedas and connected scriptures to become master and expound Advaita philosophy to the world? Within such short period, could he have produced such world famous literature of philosophy, theology and ethics? All Sanskrit works which mention his name e.g. Sarvajnatman (10th cent. CE), Sankarahridayagama (13th cent. CE) Durgaprasadayati (14th cent. CE) and the works attributed to him are dated in the later period only.

That Kerala Sanskrit literature could go back to 7th century and other conclusions are made only based on available evidences without taking other collaborating and corroborative circumstantial evidences into account. However, it may be noted that the Kerala school of astronomy goes back to 3rd century CE with Vararuchi. In fact, the Kerala astronomers fervently claim that Aryabhata belong to them. Therefore, such contradicting features have to be taken into account and reconciled by the scholars who have involved in deciding dates.

The contemporary scholars, who have debated with Sankara have been placed in different periods.

- a) Darmakirti is dated to 530-600 and 600 -660 CE
- b) Kumarila Bhatta is dated back to early 7th cent, CE, 600-660 CE & so on
- c) Mandana Misra is dated to 615-695 CE, 690-710 CE and so on.

Author	Philosopher	Date assigned	Remarks
Taranatha Tibetan Lama	Kumarila Bhatta	7th cent CE	He was a contemporary of the Tibetan King Srong-stan-Gampo who ruled in 7th cent. CE
S.Kuppuswami Sastri	—do—	600-660 CE	In his introduction to the Brahma Siddhi"
Jha	—do—	Early 7th cent. 600-650 CE	Because he wa a junior contemporary of Prabhakar, who lived between 600 and 650 CE.
S.Kuppuswami Sastri	Mandana Misra	615 —695 CE	
P. V. Kane	—do—	690-710 CE	History of Dharna Sastra, Vol.i pp.252-256

Thus, each appears to have been living for many years. Scholars point out that though *Madhyaamika Nagarjuna* (2nd cent. CE) and *Tantrija Nagarjuna*



are very much different, yet, the Buddhist traditions speak of them as one single Nagarjuna living for more than 5 centuries. To suit with Sankara's dates, they cannot be made contemporary with Sankara or Sankara could be placed in one date and his contemporaries in different dates. When Sankara lived only for 32 years with active intellectual life say 16-20 years with scholars, he could not have met all these pundits at different places of Bharat during 788-820 or specifically between 800 and 820. Otherwise, either he must have been living from 600 to 850 like Nagarjuna or there must have been one or more Sankaras during the material period.

**Keralotpatti**, work of history of Kerala written in Malayalam, give two dates for Adi Sankara 400 CE and 427 CE. Another work, **Kongudesa-Raja-Katrha** notes that he was born in the middle of 5th century CE. The **Keraladesa Sarittiram** mentions that Sankaracharya was born during the reign of Seraman Perumal, who was ruling Keraladesa between 313 and 276 BCE. Of course, Kalady, the birth place of Adi Sankara is there. Thus the Kerala tradition varies from 4th century BCE to 5th century CE.

**Karnataka Tradition:** Adi Sankara has established a mutt at Sringeri, but none of the local literature or inscriptions mentions either his name or his works. The sojourn of Chandragupta Maurya to Sravanabelagola after his conversion to Jainism, to die following a penance has been recorded. In fact, the region exhibits the dominance of jains than Buddhists, but, there had not been any reference of Sankara encountering Jains. The dominant Virasaiva tradition and its literature in certain areas do not make any reference to Sankara or his philosophy.

Sravanbegola was an acknowledged seat of learning during the 7th - 8th centuries. When there was debate going on in the Court of Himasitala at Kanchipuram, a scholar named Akalanka from here was summoned to face the Buddhists in the debate. **Akalanka** in 788 CE defeated the Buddhists and expelled so that they went to Ceylon. This is quite interesting, because, not only the date 788 CE, but also the expelling of Buddhists from Kanchi associated with Sankara. Then Akalanka might have influenced Sankara a lot!

**Andhrapradesh Tradition:** Andhrapradesh had been the stronghold of Buddhism with lot of archaeological evidences proving its presence. Therefore, had Sankara been in existence in any material period, he would have had tough time there. But none of the local literature or inscriptions mentions either his name or his works. In fact, the Buddhist records too do not make any reference to him.

The Andhra history well supported by historical evidences prove that the so called Brahmanic religion had been dominating the first centuries of the current era before and after his mark (300 BCE to 300 CE). The so called Brahmanical revival exhibited through the yagna fires started quenching the Buddhist and



scorching | jaina creeds to death. This clearly indicates the irrelevance of | Sankara to appear again thereafter and beat the dead horse.

**The Contemporary Rulers of Tamizhagam:** Politically, the ancient Tamizhagam is nothing but South India comprising the four states, Tamilnadu, Andhrapradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. However, this region was ruled by different dynasties concentrating their powers to certain cities and surrounding areas. Thus the kings and rulers of different dynasties like the Banas, the Muttariyas, the Kodumbalur chiefs, the Cholas of Uraiyur and Palaiyarai, the Cholas of Renadu, the Adigamans, the Western Gangas, the Rastrkutas, the Nonambas and others were reigning the areas. Of which, those who were ruling between 8th and 9th century are considered as follows :

Name of the Ruler	Date (approximate)	Dynasty
Nandivarman Pallava Mallan	710-755	Pallava
Dandivarman	775-826	— do —
Nandivarman II	826-849	— do —
Neduncadaiyan Parandagan	765-790	Pandya
Rajasimha Pandyan II	790-792	— do —
Varaguna Pandyan	792-835	— do —
Vikramaditya	733-743	Chalukya
Dhruva	780-794	Rastrakuta
Govinda II	793-814	— do —
Amoghavarsha I Nriputunga	814-878	— do —
Narppidigu alias Paradiraiyan	770-791	Muttaraiyar
Videllvidunga Muttarian alias Kuravan Sattan	791-826	— do —
Sattam Paliyal	826-851	— do —
Simhapota Nombadhiraja	785-805	Nolamba
Parameswara Pallavahiraja alias Charuponnera	805-830	— do —
Vijayaditya I	772-824	Bana
Malladeva	824-843	— do —
Vikramaditya I	843-892	— do —

They were patronizing Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina believers, though, they had different faith and pursuit. However, none of them appeared to have had any



acquaintance with Sankara. Though, Sankara was reportedly moving from place to place meeting different people, it is intriguing to note, why none had appeared to have felt his presence during the 8th and 9th century rulers. Even the contemporary literature has been silent about him. The Azhwars and Nayanmars, who have been assigned to the period have also not whispered about him. Some of the contemporary Saint-poets are tabulated below:

Name of the Saint-poet	Period
Tirugnanasambandar	c 7thcent. CE
Tirunavukkarasar	—do—
Iyadigal Kadavarkon	—do—
Sundarar	c 8th cent. CE
Ceraman Perumal	—do—
Enathi Sattanaj Sattanar	—do—
Maickavacagar	c 9th cent. CE
Pattinathu Adigal	—do—
Centhanar	—do—
Perumanadigal	—do—

Moreover, in his attempts of unifying the different faiths of various Gods and Goddesses, he must have had encounters with all those believers and their representatives at different places of India, particularly in South India. But, it is totally surprising to note that even the orthodox and fundamental Samayacharyas had been ignorant about him or took cognizance of his work. Therefore, it is evident that during the 8th and 9th centuries, he might not have existed.

**The possibilities for Sankara to Exist During 509-477 BCE or 788-820 CE Period in the Ancient Tamzhigam:**

1. The Buddhist region must have been dominating Government with the political patronage.
2. The believers of Hindu religion should be at receiving end i.e. they would have been placed at adverse conditions.
3. Any Hindu religious head could have taken such an extreme decision of driving away Buddhism, only, if Buddhist posed such a danger to Hindus and their society.
4. In other words, the Buddhism must have renounced its ethics of non-violence, etc., and resorted to mundane methods to meet its end leading



to chaos and confusion.

5. Just by philosophical debate, Buddhism could not have been driven away or it could have lost its glory.
6. The Hindus or majority people of Bharat could have been disgusted with the Buddhist religion, only if it had been contradicting, controverting, anti-people and so on,
7. Society should have been sufficiently Vedic oriented with the established Vedic Institutions for study, so that Sankara could have excelled in this field. As he debated and composed his works in Sanskrit, he must have existed in a period, where *Sanskrit had been lingua franca*.
8. However, considering the existed conditions, he should have completed his studies in secret, or at a scheduled place, where Buddhism was not there.
9. As the places of worship had been dominant during the Buddhist period, they could have been encroaching or curtailing the Hindu counterparts.
10. To counter, Hindus must have started organizing overtly and covertly fearing prosecution.

Most of the factors suit only *509-477 BCE period*, as during 788-820 period such condition was not there in Tamizhagam. However, historical evidences have to be collected for such dating.

**The Verification of Counter Claims / hostile Accounts/Unfavourable references:** Some scholars had pointed out the so called Counter Claims / Hostile Accounts / Unfavourable References made by the Buddhists in their literature.

1. Dharmapala defeating a Brahmin : Hiuen Tsang mentions that Silabhadra (c. 500 CE), disciple of Dharmapala debated with a brahmin hailing from South India for many days and defeated at last century (Beal, Life of Hiuen Tsang ...) However, the name of the Brahmin is not mentioned. Had he been Sankaracharya, he must have existed during 5th / 6th centuries.
2. Dharmakirti defeating a Sankaracharya: Dharmakirti (530-600 or 600-660 CE) had debate with a very learned Sankaracharya and defeated him. Because of the defeat, Sankaracharya committed suicide by jumping into deep waters of Ganges (Tatanatha's History of Buddhism in India, Simla, 1970). Here the name "Sankaracharya" has been specially mentioned.
3. Pracchanna Buddha - the accusation : Sankara has been accused of being a Buddhist. According to this allegation that Sankara himself was a Buddhist taking similarities between Advaita and the Buddhist concepts of Vijnana and Sunya, Madhyamika Buddhism and so on. But, scholars



have clearly refuted such allegations in the philosophical litigation.

Therefore, these claims cannot be brushed away as hostile Accounts / unfavourable references and the veracity of them should be analyzed critically, as it has bearing on the issue. The following possibilities are evident and they should be taken into account:

1. The grudge of Buddhists against Sankara had been there, as he was the reason for the decline of Buddhism.
2. The debates between the Hindus and Buddhists had been common during 5th / 6th / 7th centuries CE.
3. The debates might have been of peaceful nature in accordance with the Indian tradition of "tarka" i.e. debate.
4. The literary evidence says only "a Sankaracharya" and need he be "Adi Sankara" or ordinary Sankara is debatable.
5. In any case, Sankara tradition goes back to 5th century CE and even before.
6. Though, the debate takes place, the debator hails from the South proving the intellectual condition of the South.
7. The Praechanna Buddha allegation clearly proves as to how the Buddhists have taken seriousness of Sankara.

**Analysis of the Cambodian inscription :** The movement of South Indians from Tamizhagam to Southeast India is known from the inscriptions. Particularly, the movement of Kaundanya gotra Brahmins is found in such inscriptions and such preference is not explained by the scholars. Here, as Sankaracharya has been associated with Cambodia, the inscription in question has to be studied critically.

*Tena dhiptani shastrani bhagavacchankaragnayat*

*Yah: sadha dakhshinachar: kumbayonirivaparah*

*Nishsheshamudharli malalidadagripangajat*

*Tarka kavya dishabutamidhabudhimavaya yaha*

*Purana bharatas shaisha saiva vyakarnadhisu*

*Shastreshy kushalo yohabhut tatharaka iva svayam*

*Saravidhaikanilayo vedhavidh viparsambhavah*

*Shasko yasya bhagvan rudro ivaparah:*

Sivasoma is said to have studied sastras at the feet of Bhagavacchankara and





he was the preceptor of Indravarman (878-887 A.D). Indravarman was the grandson of Jayavarman's maternal uncle, known to have lived during 802-809 A.D. Therefore, it is evident that Sivasoma himself was a teacher and he studied sastras at the feet of Bhagavacchankara.

1. In the Sankara vijayas, there is no mention about any disciple with the name Sivasoma.
2. Moreover, in the inscription, it is not mentioned specifically, as to whether, he studied in Tamizhagam or otherwise.
3. Here, the expression used Bhagavacchankara is read as "Bhagvan Sankara" or "Bhagavad Sankara" and therefore, it can be taken figuratively to represent the study with the blessings of Lord Sankara or Preceptor Sankara.
4. As Sivasoma was a teacher, traditionally also he could claim that he studied at the feet of Bhagavacchankara.
5. The expression "Dakhshinachar" connotes that the teacher who has come from the South, but whether south of India or south of Cambodia is to be clarified.
6. It is a fact that the Brahmins of South India had gone to the Southeast Asian countries for different purposes connected with realization of rituals, rites, ceremonies, performance of coronation or rulers, act as a Royal Preceptor, in charge of Ashrams and so on.
7. Of whom, who was Bhagavacchankara has to be decided.
8. Therefore, more evidences are required to equate Bhagavacchankara with Adi Sankara, as has been done.
9. Incidentally, the gotra of Sambandar has been Kaundanya and that of Sankara is Atri. Therefore, can we interpret that Sivasoma might have studied at the feet of Sambandar instead of Sankara, as Sambandar's gotra is Kaundanya and he is supposed to be the Dravidashishu, Dravidacharya and thus Dakhshinachar.
10. In any case, the sole dependence on this inscription cannot fix the date of Sankara conclusively.

**The Question of Sanmata in Sangam Literature :** From Tolkappiyam onwards, the ancient Tamil literature has been consistent about the description of the believers. Their worship varies from natural elements like Sun, Moon; Fire and to other theriomorphic forms, which have been vividly described. The Tamils were worshipping specific Gods and Goddesses based on the five tinaiis -



1. Kurouchi (Mountain and its surrounding areas),
2. Mullai (Forest and their related areas),
3. Marudham (agricultural fields and their surrounding areas),
4. Neydhal (Ocean / sea and its areas) and
5. Palai (desert and its surrounding areas), each with specific Gods as follows :

Tinai	God	Tamil name	Vahana	Element	Natural area
Kurinchi	Murugan	Ceylon	Peacock	Earth	Mountainous area
Mullai	Vishnu	Mayon	Kite/Garuda	Water	Forest area
Marudham	Indra	Vendan	Elephant/ Ram	Fire	Agricultural field
Neidhal	Varuna	VARunan	Swan	Wind	Oceanic Area
Palai	Sakti	Kotravai	Lion	Ether	Desert Area

From the panchabhutatva of assigning God to each natural mode, it can easily be related to six factors. In fact, the numbers five and six are easily related together cosmologically, theologically and philosophically. Sankara, has perhaps taken a cue from this five division to form 'Sanmata' or incorporate the the existing into the new mode by just adding one more, so that all believers could be easily accommodated without any problem and compromise.

**The Driving away of Buddhism from India :** If the fact that Sankara drove away Buddhism from India during the material periods, then, Buddhism must have been at the peak posing danger to Hindu religion on all aspects. The Buddhists must have been exercising their influence in all social, political, economic and other spheres. The Hindus must have been at the receiving end with lot of restrictions imposed upon them in their day to day religious life. Had the Buddhists been so powerful in all aspects, how the ordinary young monk Sankara could have achieved such a great feat just talking philosophy of Advaita?

Sittalai Sattanar, a Buddhist apologetic poet never mentions Sankara or Advaita, though, much has been discussed about all philosophical systems of India existing during his period. However, as he mentions about Vedavadi, i.e. debator based on Vedas, it is evident that such concept must have existed during and before Sittalai Sattanar.

**Why he left out Jainism?** Jainism and Buddhism are both atheistic and reportedly anti-Vedic, anti-Brahmanic, anti-Sanskritic religions. Then, why he



should have chosen to drive Buddhism exclusively away from India? Some scholars have pointed out that there are many similarities between Jainism and Buddhism, and Buddhism might have been developed out of Jainism or both have had a common origin. Scholars accept that both entered Tamizhagam before Sangam period.

The Jains had been dominating politically with the patronage received from the rulers. Particularly, Chandragupta Maurya was converted to Jainism, though, his grandson Asoka was a great Buddhist carrying out his missionary activities internationally. In fact, the Kalabhras (200 to 400 CE), who have reportedly affected and inflicted upon the Tamils and their culture, were considered as Jains. The archaeological evidences amply prove that the Karnataka part of Tamizhagam was predominant with Jainism. In fact, during the material period, Jains were dominating the Tamil literary field also by producing Jain epics and grammar works in Tamil. Similarly, had Sankara influenced Tamizhagam with his activities, he must have been mentioned in the Tamil literature. But, it has been totally silent as explained above. That a Sambandar had to appear to overcome Jainism proves to what extent Jainism instead of Buddhism had affected and afflicted Tamizhagam. Had Jainism been so ahimsa oriented, non-violent, vegetarian, totally renouncing and abdicating, why it should affect others. Therefore, there is a strong reason that political clout acquired by the Jains would have resorted to persecute others leading to retaliation.

Conclusion : Based on the literary evidences, it is argued that the Sangam period (500 BCE - 500 CE or 300 BCE - 300 CE), including Tirukkural have concepts of Vedanta and Advaita. The 8th-9th century period does not record his presence. Therefore, he may be located between the intervening period 500/300 to 700 CE or placed before Sangam period. As the Sangam literature has more internal evidences than the intervening period, Sankara may be placed before Sangam period.

The regions Andhra and Karnataka, though part of Tamizhagam had accountable history unlike the Tamizhagam proper in spite of possession of Sangam literature. Considering the corroborating and collaborating circumstantial evidences, it is unbelievable that there was no history before Sangam period. Therefore, the history Tamizhagam has to be considered in consonance with Andhra and Karnataka. The available archaeological evidences cannot be interpreted in the modern concept of Andhra and Karnataka, but as the ancient Tamizhagam.

If an independent chronology without disputed synchronisms is developed, then, definitely Sankara could be located in the ancient Tamizhagam. Based on literary evidences, the history of Tamizhagam could go before the so called Sangam period and then the explanation of historical processes would be easy



as all Kings and kingdoms would be consistent with each other proving the interdependence instead of existing in isolation a has been depicted now. Kharavela of 2nd century BCE could not have defeated a threatening Dravidian confederation, had there not been any such confederation of Tamil kings and those kings would not have come into existence from vacuum. Therefore, the history of Tamizhagam should be interpreted in the right perspective comprehensively and not in isolation. Refined literature without archaeological evidences or archaeological evidences without any literature cannot be a criterion to debunk the tradition of such existing literature or disbelieve the history of the people who produced such refined literature. Therefore, history of Tamils goes before Sangam period i.e. before 500 BCE and the study of Sankara may pave way for knowing more about it.

